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Osaka University

## **In memoriam Semih TEZCAN (1943–2017)**



Celebrating Semih Tezcan's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (January 2003)

From left: Semih Tezcan, Klaus Kreiser, Sigrid Kleinmichel, Peter Zieme

A few days ago (September 14<sup>th</sup> 2017), Professor Semih Tezcan, a renowned scholar worldwide, passed away before his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 2006, he was the recipient of the Science Award of the Turkish Academy of Science, and he has been the senior source of inspiration for all domains of Turcology. It is very sad that he cannot give the finishing touch to the numerous projects he was engaged in. Scholars, friends and pupils join in commemorating Semih Hoca, who gained high celebrity especially in Germany.

The birth of Semih Tezcan to Mustafa Rifat Tezcan from Tarsus and his wife Nezahat Fevziye Tezcan was registered in the city of Mersin on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943. He was actually born a month earlier, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1942, but there was, at that time a custom to postpone the birthday of boys born in December to the next year so that the young lad could enter military service one year later.

Between 1960 and 1964, Tezcan studied at the University of Ankara, and became an assistant at the Department of Turkish Language and Literature in 1964. Through the help of his prominent and well-respected teacher Saadet Çagatay, he received a scholarship for going to Germany. In October 1964 he went to Hamburg, where Professor Annemarie v. Gabain took him under her wings. At her retirement, he went to the University of Göttingen, where Gerhard Doerfer finally became his Doktorvater.

On the advice of A. v. Gabain, Semih Tezcan began to work as Ph. D. thesis on the edition of an Old Uigur manuscript, a miscellany. The booklet, the *İnsadi-sūtra*, was published in the series *Berliner Turfantexte* (BT III) in 1974. This study, like all his subsequent scholarly work, are consistently characterized by accurate research and deep reflection on each single word, each single phrase.

During that time, Gerhard Doerfer had re-discovered Khaladj, an archaic Turkic language spoken in Iran. Shortly after the defense of his thesis, Semih Tezcan entered a project team for field-work on this language. In 1971, he returned to Ankara. Because of his scientific travels to East Berlin he was not granted a position at the university. However, after his military service in 1974, he successfully began to work on another Old Uigur text, the Tenth book of the Old Uigur translation of the Chinese biography of Xuanzang, the famous Chinese monk who traveled from China to India to find the original Buddhist texts. In 1976, he completed this as his habilitation thesis. Between 1976 and 1983 he worked at the Turkish Language Society (Türk Dili Kurumu). In 1984, he received an invitation to teach at the Institute for Turkish and Turkish Culture in Bamberg, which he accepted; he was active there for many years.

In 1994, Semih Tezcan was elected as a member of the Turfan Commission, which accompanies the work of the researchers of the project Turfanforschung at the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities; between 2002 and 2016 he was chairman of this commission.

After his retirement from the University of Bamberg in 2008, Tezcan returned to Ankara and became a senior member of the Department of Turkish Literature at Bilkent University. In 2013, a Festschrift to celebrate his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with the title *Yarmakan* — an Old Turkic word meaning “gift,” registered in Kashgharī’s *Dīvān Luġātī’l-Türk* — was published as a special issue of the journal *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*.

Old Uigur studies were his primary field, but Semih Hoca had much broader interests. Beside Khaladj he devoted his interests to Old Anatolian, to Harezm-Turkic literature, to the Dede Korkut epic, to the work of Evliya Chelebi, the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century traveler and to much more. He had a feeling for correct and good Turkish, his beloved mother-tongue. He loved old and new literature, proverbs and folk literature. He was interested in the broad history of words. In short, he devoted his life to the study of Turkish language and literature, but in all his works he continuously sharpened his scholarly eye through new methods and new materials. He was open-minded, a good friend and a genial raconteur. His wife Nuran was his true comrade throughout his life. Nuran Hanım and the three daughters can be sure that they are joined in their thoughts by a large community of friends all over the world. Semih Bey will remain in the hearts of all of us!

I would like to remember our friend, gone to another world, with a proverb from a collection on which his study is nearly completed:

ارته کوجرن دیوب کوسکک او جغه یقمه

“If you want to leave early, don’t leave the poker enflamed in the oven!”

Peter ZIEME